DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 172 CE 015 828

AUTHOR Novak, Jan L.; Kosmo, Susan J.
TITLE A Systems Approach to Developing Employability Programming.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Toronto, Canada, March 27-31, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Education; *Employment; Employment Potential; Employment Qualifications; *Interpersonal Competence; Job Application; Job Search Methods; Job Skills; *Measurement Instruments; Post Secondary Education; *Program Evaluation; *Program Planning; Promotion (Occupational); Surveys; Systems Approach; Trade and Industrial Education; Vocational Development; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Designed to develop materials by a systems approach to help local postsecondary educators plan and evaluate vocational job training programs, this project focused on the following: (1) the personal, interpersonal, and social skills necessary for job acquisition and survival in office, trade, and industry occupations; (2) the development and field testing of an instrument to assess a student's ability in the skills and traits identified in 1; and (3) guidelines for using the instrument. The data collection procedures consisted of the following activities: a review of the literature; a search of nationally recognized tests of vocational readiness, vocational maturity, and of personality scales relating to employability; and a survey of employers, teachers, and former students in industrial and business vocational program areas by placement personnel in two Wisconsin vocational schools. Based on the results of the data collection procedures, the major content areas selected to be covered on the employability instrument were job getting, job seeking, and job advancement. A series of items related to each of these content areas was developed using a vignette framework. (Validation of the instrument is currently in progress.) (VB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED154172

A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMMING

Paper by

Jan L. Novak, Presenter
Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center

and

Susan J. Kosmo
Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center

John D. Hartz, Project Director
Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jan L. Novak

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

A paper presented at the
American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting 1978
Toronto, Canada

Session 8.04 - Research in Vocational-Technical Education

OE 015828

Printed in U.S.A.

PROJECT ABSTRACT

This project is designed to develop materials to help local post-secondary educators plan and evaluate job training programs. Its focus is on the personal, interpersonal, and social skills which aid job success. The project demonstrates the application of a systems approach to the development of employability programming in post-secondary vocational education programs.

Technical skills alone are insufficient for entry into a competitive job market such as that of the seventies. Students also need the communication and interpersonal skills required to behave effectively in the various social interactions associated with job entry, retention, and advancement.

To apply a systems approach to the development of social skills programming, the first step involves identifying the social behaviors associated with employment. A thorough review of existing literature and surveys of employers, former students, and school placement personnel were used to identify the social skills needed for entry, retention, and advancement. A self-report instrument was constructed to assess current student status on these variables. Validation of the instrument involved administration to a group of successfully employed and a group of unemployed and underemployed students. The validation was performed on samples drawn from two program areas: business occupations and technical-industrial occupations. Differences in social skill requirements for the two samples were noted.

THE SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
OF POST-SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Objectives

The purpose of this federally-funded project is to develop materials to help local post-secondary educators plan and evaluate job training programs. It is designed to identify the non-job skills and traits which help individuals get and keep jobs. The objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the personal, interpersonal, and social skills necessary for job acquisition and survival.
2. To develop and field test an instrument designed to assess students' ability in the skills and traits identified in objective 1.
3. To develop guidelines for using the instrument and results for local program planning and evaluation in vocational education.

Perspective or Theoretical Framework

Literature on employability has focused on both technical skills needed for job performance and personal, interpersonal, and social skills. The USOE objectives for Vocational Education Act Part D monies in 1975 supported this dual perspective, as they stressed personal development, self concept, and self awareness in addition to competency in academic and vocational skills. Such federally funded projects in the past as an Office Employment Profile (ED 103 657), Employability Skills for the Vocational Cooperative Student (ED 097 474), Factors Associated with Successful Adaptation to the Secretarial/Stenographic Role (ED 026 531) and Teaching for Employability (ED 075 621) have attempted to identify those behaviors or traits contributing to successful job acquisition and continuation on the job. A large body of research in applied psychology has been conducted on the factors involved in the selection interview.

A number of research studies have attempted to single out those personality factors which make an employee a "success."

There are several drawbacks to past research on the subject. Experimental studies involving the employment interview are often too theoretical. The experimental situations established are not carefully controlled or applicable to the post-secondary student seeking employment in the real world. Excellent vocational research like the studies cited above is often limited to a single profession or is not couched in terms useful to the local vocational planner. In general, past research has been separated from the mainstream of vocational training. Neither has it attempted to draw comparisons between occupations.

The Systems Approach to Assessment and Evaluation of Post-Secondary Vocational Programs is designed not only to identify the factors related to employability, but also to discern whether the same factors hold true in differing occupations. The communications skills demanded of welders on the job, for example, may be very different from those demanded of secretaries. Project staff have chosen two vocational-technical institutions in Wisconsin--one urban and one rural--and two different fields--office occupations and trade and industry--to test the variables identified. A thorough review of literature on employability and a preliminary series of interviews preceded the construction of the final inventory of employability variables.

This project is intended, therefore, to develop instrumentation (inventory format) to establish empirical models and standards for the non-job skills necessary in individual but broadly different occupations. The concept incorporated both assessment and re-assessment components. It allows for program evaluation by testing the validity of the factors or traits identified. Students may be assessed before and after a course in employability; before and after employment; and at intervals in their employment history after graduation from

a post-secondary program. Findings may be incorporated into the curriculum in specific occupational programs.

Methodology/Data Collection

A thorough review of literature was conducted. This included commercial and "how to" guides on job finding and keeping, as well as scholarly research and experimental studies in the area of applied psychology. The Literature Search included both a hand search of materials and a Lockheed Search of Computerized data bases, including AIM/ARM, ABI/Inform, NTIS, Psychology Abstracts, and Sociology Abstracts. A complete search was made of nationally recognized tests of vocational readiness, vocational maturity, and personality scales to identify useful constructs relating to employability. From these sources a list of several hundred variables was compiled. Project staff used a card sort method to group the variables into clusters. Twelve general areas of employability were identified. An interview format was developed on the basis of the twelve clusters. Placement personnel in the two Wisconsin Vocational technical schools interviewed employers, teachers in industrial and business vocational program areas, and former students. The purpose of the interviews was to discover more information, validate the variables already identified, or to modify or change them for the final inventory. Results of the literature review and the interviews are being incorporated into an employability assessment instrument. (Project scheduled for completion March, 1978).

Results of Data Collection

A. Summary of Employability Literature

The commercial materials, research literature, and employer surveys tend to be in general agreement on the approach an applicant should take in job-seeking. In essense, they all emphasize the importance of "salesmanship." The applicant must know what his or her skills are and what type of demand exists for the skills. Furthermore, just as successful salespeople have

confidence in the product they are promoting, so too must the job-seeker express confidence in his or her abilities.

The employer is attempting to predict the applicant's on-the-job behavior, often times from unreliable data. To the extent that the applicant can make this predicting process easier for the employer, s/he increases the likelihood of being selected. Among the criteria used by interviewers to predict future performance are:

1) past behavior of applicant,
2) appearance of applicant,
3) interview behavior, and
4) expressed interest in company/job.

The applicant's ability to describe his or her past experience in terms of the job sought is particularly critical. Prior related work experience is probably the easiest to relate; however, many of the vocational education graduates may have related training without related experience. These students will need to be aware of the other criteria used in applicant selection, such as appropriate interpersonal relations skills and work habits. As Hakel and Schuh (1971) have noted, applicants who have positive traits in these areas will "get. . . to first base in almost any occupation."

Appearance and interview behavior are also used to make predictions regarding future behavior. The care with which the individual prepared for the interview, including selection of clothing and gaining background information on the company, are treated as predictive of the quality, neatness, or accuracy that the individual will apply to subsequent work produced. Similarly, the interview may be viewed by some as a sample of the person's interpersonal behavior. The courtesy and respect shown to the interviewer are used to gauge how the employee will interact with the co-workers and supervisor on the job. Expressed interest in the job is also used in screening applicants on the assumption that, if the person wants to work for this company or in this job, they will be more likely to comply with the

performance expectations.

The following personal/social skills appear to be pivotal behavioral requirements for effective job seeking:

1. Ability to present positive impression of self on application blank or resume.
   - completed in neat manner
   - skills described in terms of job requirements
   - positive answer to "reason for leaving previous employer"
2. Ability to present positive impression of self in an interview.
   - neat and clean appearance
   - appropriate dress
   - punctual
   - follows rules of common courtesy (re: smoking, sitting, etc.)
   - describes previous training/experience in terms of current job requirements
   - maintains conversational flow
   - describes why interested in particular job/company
   - indicates interest in remaining with company over time
3. Ability to select references who will present positive appraisal of applicant's ability to perform successfully on job in question.

These skills appear to be basic requirements for effective job seeking.

Based on the literature reviewed, several personal/social skills were identified as being important for job retention. The behaviors generally related to work attitudes/productivity and personal behaviors characteristics. The identified behaviors were based on the responses of employers and educators/personnel in education or employment. While the populations surveyed and the methodologies used in the studies varied, some skills were frequently rated highly or mentioned more often than others.

In several studies, employers were asked to rank employee behaviors as to their importance in job retention. These ratings were based on predetermined lists of behaviors/skills presented to the employers. Among the most highly rated behaviors were initiative, dependability, accuracy, and judgment. In addition to these non-job skills, the quantity of work and quality of work (job-skills) were also highly rated. Other skills frequently rated as important to job retention by the employers surveyed include appearance, cooperativeness, adaptability, ability to get along with others, and attitude.

Other studies included in the literature reviewed surveyed vocational educators, field practitioners, manpower personnel, students, employees, and researchers. The most frequently mentioned behaviors rated highly are responsibility, dependability, efficiency, honesty, attitude, pride in work, and attendance. While there was some variance between the responses of the employers and the other people surveyed, dependability and attitude are frequently mentioned by all groups as being extremely important. Many other behaviors are also frequently mentioned by all groups, however the ranked order of importance varied.

B. Summary of Survey Responses

Employers, instructors, and former students have been surveyed regarding hiring practices, interviews, job qualifications, job applications, employee behavior, etc. Their responses generally agree with many studies and materials reviewed during the literature. Positive traits emphasized by employers regarding people seeking employment include appearance and personal hygiene, personality, communication skills, work attitude, prior experience or qualifications, and interest/enthusiasm. Instructors suggested the future employees be dependable and cooperative, present good appearance, be punctual, and maintain a good attendance record. Students, while indicating the above traits were important, also stressed past work experience, background and skills, and academic qualifications.

Non-job skills needed to keep a job suggested by all three populations generally referred to enthusiasm, regular attendance and punctuality, consideration and respect for co-workers and employers, and good job performance.

Reasons for termination mentioned most frequently included absenteeism/attendance, tardiness, poor attitude, inability to get along with others, laziness/mismanagement of time, irresponsibility, emotional instability or other personality problems, and doing work improperly.

Characteristics important for job advancement cited by employers included previous performance, seniority, leadership, attitude toward work, desire to be promoted, motivation, interpersonal skills, and willingness to do extra work.

C. Conclusion

Identification of performance standards, assessment of student performance against these standards, and the development of programs to train students in the desired competencies are essential components in competency-based training. The vocational educational field offers training programs to help students develop and acquire the skills basic for meeting job requirements and for functioning in the world of work. It has been an accepted opinion that job entry, retention and advancement are influenced by both the social skills of the individual and the specific technical skills the person possesses. Both the review of literature and the survey data confirm that social, personal, and interpersonal skills play an important role in employment success.

Instrumentation

Based on the results of the above data collection procedures, the major content areas selected to be covered on the employability instrument were:

1) Job-getting: describing skills, completing application procedures, identifying sources of job leads, selecting references, and appropriate interview behavior.

2) Job-keeping: ability to get along with co-workers and supervisor, emotional stability, attitude, dependability, responsibility, adaptability, appearance, enthusiasm and conscienciousness.

3. Job advancement: initiative and ambition.

A series of items related to each of these content areas were developed using a vignette framework. Following review by a panel of experts and pilot testing, 70 items remained in the item pool. These 70 items have been divided into two parallel test forms each containing 35 items. The final instrument is currently being mailed to former students of Milwaukee Area Technical College and Southwest Vocational Technical Institute at Fennimore, Wisconsin. The instrument consists of a series of vignettes describing events one may encounter in seeking and keeping a job. For example:

> Joe is interviewing for a job as a maintenance mechanic at Biff's Supply Company. During the interview he is asked why he would like to work for this company. His best response would be:
>
> A. "It's close to home and I'd like to remain in this area."
>
> B. "I've heard that there is excellant job security here and I'm interested in staying in one place."
>
> C. "I know the wages are good and that is important to me."
>
> D. "I know this company is a leader in the machine tool supply business."

The responses of former students who are successfully employed will be compared with those who are not employed or are employed in an unrelated area to determine whether a difference in personal-social and interpersonal skills exists between the two populations. Those items differentiating between the two groups will be included in the final instrument.

Publications

The review of literature is currently in the final editing stage. Information regarding its cost and availability will be announced in the near future.

Job Seeking and Job Keeping: An Annotated Bibliography is currently available from the Center ($1.50).

User's Guide to Selected Published Tests Relating to Vocational/Career Education is currently in the final editing stage. Information regarding its cost and availability will be announced in the near future.

References

Hakel, Milton D. and Schuh, Allen J. "Job Applicant Attributes Judged Important Across Seven Diverse Occupations." Personnel Psychology, 1971, 24, 45-52.

For further information, write or call John Hartz, Ph.D., Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center, 349 Education Building-Box 49, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. Phone (608) 263-3679.